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Empowering Communities. Advocating Solutions.

**Testimony to the Government Accountability and Elections Committee
Testimony by Louis W. Burch
Citizens Campaign for the Environment**

**March 2, 2015
Hartford, CT**

Senator Cassano, Representative Jutila, esteemed members of the Government Accountability and Elections, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important issue.

My name is Louis Burch, Program Coordinator for Citizens Campaign for the Environment (CCE). Supported by over 80,000 members in Connecticut and New York State, CCE works to empower communities and advocate for solutions that protect public health and the natural environment. CCE offers the following testimony regarding HB 6842:

HB 6842- An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning General Government

CCE is strongly opposed to sections 1 and 2 of this legislation, which eliminate funding for the CT Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). CEQ is an independent body working to promote government accountability and ensure proper compliance and enforcement of important environmental standards. It publishes a comprehensive annual report on the state of Connecticut's environment, makes policy recommendations to the General Assembly and holds monthly hearings to solicit public comments and citizen complaints. CEQ is a vital independent watchdog that directly benefits environmental health and quality of life in our State.

Currently, there are only two paid staff positions at CEQ. The agency's total projected budget needs for the 2016-2017 term are \$183,042 and \$184,446, respectively. This represents about .1% of the total budget for each of the next two years. HB 6842 proposes eliminating funding for these positions and reorganizing them under the office of Legislative Management. Unfortunately, the Governor's budget does not provide additional funding under the OLM budget to support these positions, meaning that Legislative Management would be expected to fund them within available appropriations. This is problematic as this agency's budget is already being stretched to cover existing programmatic expenses. If unable to dedicate the funds to allow CEQ to continue to function, OLM would have the discretion to eliminate it altogether.

Time and again, CEQ has found itself on the proverbial chopping block while other state agencies enjoy increased funding for dozens, sometimes hundreds of new staff positions. For example, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services would receive 129 new staff positions in 2016, which would put its total

paid staff positions to 3,438, representing a 4% increase in staff size. The State Department of Corrections receives an additional 542 full-time, permanent positions under the Governor's budget, which will bring its staff size to 6,894. While CCE is not opposed to these other important agencies getting staff increases, CEQ should not be subject to disproportionate cuts, compared to other state agencies. Our environment is a necessity, not a luxury item that should be cut in difficult budget times.

CEQ's two paid positions require a relatively small investment, considering the valuable and necessary services that the council provides for taxpayers in Connecticut. Eliminating CEQ would be an unfair and disproportionate blow to Connecticut's environmental protection infrastructure, which could lead to more pollution in our state, decreased enforcement, and diminished air and water quality in the long term. It is a short sighted plan and must not be allowed to move forward. **CEQ must be allowed to maintain its functions *and* its independence, so that it can continue to safeguard Connecticut's precious environmental resources for years to come. CCE strongly opposes HB 6842 and respectfully urges this committee to take no action on this ill-conceived proposal.**

On behalf of our members in Connecticut, we appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony and look forward to working with you on this important issue.